

United States Senate

October 21, 2020

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie,

I am writing to request that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) move forward with the process to initiate review and approval of a Veterans Affairs Medical Center location in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

I am forever grateful to our nation's men and women who served in uniform and it is critical that the VA continually take steps to evaluate, identify, and address growing population needs. Our nation's veterans deserve timely access to quality care and where gaps exist, the VA should take steps to rectify those breakdowns in accessibility. One such gap exists in El Paso County, Colorado where Census Bureau data indicates that there are over 83,000 veterans living in El Paso County, 16% of the population.

I have previously written to the VA regarding unacceptable wait times at the PFC Floyd K. Lindstrom Clinic Outpatient Clinic at Colorado Springs which is located in El Paso County. According to VA data, veterans seeking a primary care appointment at the PFC Floyd K. Lindstrom VA Clinic currently have to wait an average of 22 days before a new patient can be seen. As the veteran population in El Paso County continues to experience rapid growth, the need for additional health care resources will only increase.

I appreciate the briefing on October 16, 2020 from Rocky Mountain Regional VA Medical Center and Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISN)-19 staff that noted that in fiscal year 2019 the PFC Floyd K. Lindstrom VA Clinic served over 32,000 veterans. This data clearly indicates that the clinic is undersized for the growing veteran population.

I hear frequently from veterans in El Paso County about the need for additional access to services. The Rocky Mountain VA Medical Center was the culmination of over a decade of advocacy from Colorado veterans and faced countless hurdles from the moment a need was identified in the late 1990s to the day the facility opened its doors in 2018. It is critical that now that the need has been identified for an expansion of services in Colorado Springs that this process moves quickly and effectively. While there is a longer term review of all VA infrastructure currently scheduled, the Asset Infrastructure Review Commission is not scheduled to submit recommendations to the president until 2023, and if approved through the procedure laid out in the VA MISSION Act (P.L. 115-182), then the VA has another three years for implementation.

I also request that the VA take steps to consider collaboration with the Department of Defense (DoD) to evaluate ways that the two agencies could partner together on this project. In addition to the incredible veteran presence in El Paso County, the county is also home to a vibrant active duty community with four military installations and tens of thousands of military personnel and their families who call Colorado Springs home. I am incredibly proud of Colorado's active duty military strength, courage, and bold vision for the future. The spirit of collaboration that already exists in Colorado Springs between the military installations and the surrounding community has the potential to serve as a catalyst for a groundbreaking partnership between the DoD and VA both on this project and future healthcare and capital planning initiatives.

We cannot delay the process to support veterans and potentially active duty service members living in El Paso County and I urge the VA to move forward with all necessary steps to evaluate, approve a new VA Medical Center, and determine potential for DoD collaboration to meet this need for Colorado.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Cory Gardner", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Cory Gardner
United States Senator